



A Community Newsletter for:

KINNERSLEY-SARNESFIELD-LETTON-NORTON CANNON-BROBURY
STAUNTON-ON-WE-MORNINGTON-ON-WE-MORHAMPTON

THE DISAPPEARING FARMS

THE biggest change in farming in recent times has been the severe decline in the number of farmers and those working on the land. Take a look at these figures for Hereford and Worcester, obtained from the Ministry of Agriculture:

Year	Number of Farms
1951	14,200
1961	12,800
1971	8,200
1981	5,100

Since the last war we have been losing farms and people in farming faster than at any time in history. From 1971 to 1981, the average for Hereford and Worcester was a staggering 310 farms lost PER YEAR! This is having a serious consequence for farming, its future and the countryside.

Since 1951 the average farm size in the county has increased threefold, for it is the small farmer who is disappearing and nowhere faster than in the dairy industry, where expensive surpluses have been built up by the big intensive dairy units.

Last week dairy farmers heard that they will be cut back to 1985 production levels minus 6%, and with immediate effect, whether they are big or small, intensive or traditional. It is the small dairy farmer who can least afford it as well as being the least responsible for the surplus in the first place.

The way the quotas have been implemented is in line with the long term bias against the small farmer, whose continuing decline is caused not by free market forces but because most public subsidies to

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farming go to the big intensive farms.

Furthermore dairy farming is one of main options for small farmers and potential new entrants into farming. On poorer land it is sometimes the only option. The following figures show drastic decline in the number of smaller dairy holdings:

Year	<u>Less than forty</u>		<u>forty and over</u>	
	Number of dairy holdings	Number of dairy cows	Number of dairy holdings	Number of dairy cows
1972	68,035	1,133,000	30,666	2,191,000
1982	25,962	490,000	32,471	2,756,000

While the number of cows has remained constant the number of dairy holdings of under 40 cows has reduced almost threefold in just ten years and the total number of holdings nearly halved. The trend is clear and particularly ominous for a county like Herefordshire with a strong tradition of small family mixed farms.

The biggest farmers have been encouraged by the Ministry of Agriculture to expand and intensify at public expense grants have paid for large buildings, extensive drainage schemes, the removal of hedges and trees, and the removal of uneconomic marginal land often important to wildlife. An excessive dependence on chemicals has also been encouraged. This "high input" farming is expensive and compels the country's food supply to become dependent on energy, oil and imported resources. It is only profitable because the tax payer pays most of the expense.

No one can blame the big farmer for taking advantage of the existing policy to encourage even bigger farms. There are in fact many EEC shemes to help small farmers and young entrants into farming as well as money for nature conservation, but the Ministry of Agriculture refuses to operate them!

It is absurd and unjust for outputs to be cut back while at the same time encouraging bigger and more intensive farming. Cut inputs not outputs!

It is against the national interest for even one more farm to be taken over for the destruction of hedgerows and wild-life habitats. Nobody wants to go back in time. The scientific advances in veterinary medicine, genetics etc mean that we can feed ourselves indefinitely without destroying the countryside and prospects for future farmers.

David Lovelace